

Reflection for an Anniversary Sunday October 19, 2025 by Jennifer Irving

On this Anniversary, when we celebrate 134 years of worshipping in this place, I can't help but imagine those years layered one on top of the other. You know what I mean? I can almost see those who are no longer with us smiling up at me from their pew—even the people I never met—I can hear their voices ringing out while we sing those ancient hymns like “Holy, Holy, Holy”. My Mum has a couple of paintings that have this effect—they depict a present day scene but there are these images from the past that seem to have left an imprint on the present—painted by James Lumbers. Have you seen them?



That's the kind of thing I'm talking about. Perhaps you've sensed it here – this sort of after-glow that remains through time. In my experience, this sense of the past that echoes here is a gift and a blessing—reminding us of our connection to God that spans not only the time people have been worshipping here at Centennial but all the people right back to Jeremiah and all those before in a covenantal relationship with our God. We are all connected through that same covenant. It is a history that strengthens us and keeps us grounded in God's love.

No matter what the changes that happen in our world—and we all know there have been plenty of changes—it's almost mind-boggling to think of how different things are today than when we were born. I asked my girls the other day for advice to give to another mum about phones in the bedroom and they were torn because so much had already changed in that department from the time they were 10 and 12!! They are only 16 and 18 now!! But when we celebrate anniversaries like this one today, it reminds us that there are constants in the midst of all these changes and our God is one of them and so is the covenant that is written on our hearts. I love those images from Jeremiah of God making sure our hearts and minds are filled with “knowing” who God is and what God is all about. And on this special anniversary, we can lean on the faith of all those who have worshipped in this place before us. We can lean on the love of God shown to us so clearly through Jesus. We can trust in God's word that has been lifted up in sweet harmonies year after year.

So, in honour of that faith and that history, and because Barb said she wanted this service to have a lot of music in it, I thought we should sing some of those songs that have strengthened our faith, deepened our love, and encouraged our hope.

So many songs come to my mind that have reminded us of the love and power of our God that has sustained this community of faith in the past and will continue to sustain us in the years to come.

Hymns like:

We have an anchor that keeps the soul steadfast and sure while the billows roll—
fastened to the rock which cannot move, grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love
(#675 in *Voices United* – Priscilla Jane Owens, 1882)

He leadeth me, O blessed thought, O words with heavenly comfort fraught! Whate'er
I do, where'er I be, still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.
He leadeth me! He leadeth me! By his own hand he leadeth me!
His faithful follower I would be for by his hand, he leadeth me!
(#657 in *Voices United*, Joseph Henry Gilmore, 1862)

or how about:

Come, let us sing of a wonderful love, tender and true, tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above, streaming to me and to you.
Wonderful love! Wonderful love! Dwells in the heart of the father above!
(#574 in *Voices United*, Robert Walmsley, ca 1900)

or even:

Great is thy faithfulness, God our creator, there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not; thy compassions, they fail not; as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.
Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided – great is thy faithfulness, ever to me!
(#288 in *Voices United*, Thomas O. Chisholm, 1923)

or choir favourites like these:

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed.
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee, How great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee, How great thou art! How great thou art!
(#238 in *Voices United*, Carl Gustav Boberg, 1885)

Be thou my vision, O joy of my heart; naught be all else to me save that thou art,
thou my best thought, by day or by night, waking or sleeping thy presence my light.
(#642 in *Voices United*, Irish ca 8th Century)

Now, we won't sing them here this morning (that might stretch Megan to her limits) but I'm going to invite you to call out any other hymns that have been especially sweet in your faith journey – songs that have helped God's word remain firmly planted in your mind and echoing in your heart.

May all these songs continue to find an echo in our hearts and remind us, even in hard times, of God's love that never waivers. And may they help us remain open to all the joy and pain of living this day of Anniversary and every day.